Upper Delaware Council
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# UPPER DELAWARE COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
## September 3, 2026

The Upper Delaware Council held its monthly meeting on Thursday, September 3, 2026. Chairperson Dexter called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. Roll call followed reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Attendees**:
Damascus Township- Jeff Dexter, Town of Hancock- Jim Serio, Town of Fremont- Jim Rodgers (Zoom), Town of Cochecton- Larry Richardson, Town of Delaware- Harold Roeder, Town of Deerpark- Ginny Dudko and Bill Dudko, Town of Highland- Michael Keller (Zoom), Lackawaxen Township- Doug Case, Shohola Township- Aaron Robinson (Zoom), Westfall Township- Tammy Zajac, National Park Service- Lindsey Kurnath (Zoom), Commonwealth of Pennsylvania- Tim Dugan, Delaware River Basin Commission- Beth Brown (Zoom)

**Absent:**
Town of Delaware- Harold Roeder, Town of Tusten- Cathleen Breen, Town of Lumberland- Nadia Rajsz, New York State- Ryan Coulter

**Staff:**
Executive Director- Laurie Ramie, Resources and Land Use Specialist- Julie Pais, Administrative Support- Stephanie Driscoll

**Media**:
River Reporter- Sonia Ahmed (Zoom), Tri-County Independent- Peter Becker (Zoom) WJFF Radio- Patricio Robayo (Zoom),

**Guests*:***
Enx Eeden, Monika Stenecker (Zoom), Emily Moore (Zoom), Jacal (Zoom), Bill (Zoom), Brianna (Zoom), Laverne Price (Zoom), Terri (Zoom),

**Presentation - "Creating Allyships with Indigenous Peoples":** Enx Eeden expressed gratitude to the Upper Delaware Council for initiating the conversation and welcomed both familiar and new faces. He explained having a mixed heritage that includes Lenape, Asian, and European ancestry and said those different identities and backgrounds inform his environmental activism as well as work as an artist, educator, author, and first responder. He described having "hands in a couple different pots" that connects those experiences to important aspects of Indigenous community life: it takes a village to function, and individuals often serve multiple roles based on their skills and the ways they can contribute to the community. Eeden also described a longstanding family connection to water. His father, grandfathers, and earlier generations had connections to the water as river workers or boatsmen, and that tradition continues personally. One of his earliest memories is being on the water. The river remains one of the places where he feels happiest. A river contains much more than recreational or practical value. There are deep historical understandings embedded within it, and a river can "speak" in many ways. It is not simply something people live near or something that provides their water; the condition of a river can also reveal something about the health of the people and communities living around it.

That relationship provided a foundation for the larger discussion about developing relationships among Indigenous nations and between Indigenous communities and other entities. Native nations themselves are diverse. Some tribes are small, others are much larger, and some Indigenous people operate independently. The same principles of relationship-building can extend to Native nations, non-governmental organizations, government bureaus, legislative bodies, and other organizations. Rather than remaining isolated within separate areas of expertise, Eeden encouraged participants to consider ways these groups can work together and bring out the best in one another. He reflected on the cultural ties that his own relatives, on multiple continents, have had to rivers and the surrounding environment. Their experiences during periods of both war and peace taught them about their environments and about the ways environmental conditions affected their ability to care for their communities and families. This relationship between environment and community is something that remains central to his work.

Eeden said that the presentation is being offered from a personal perspective and was not intended to represent every Indigenous person or Native nation. He is speaking as an individual, friend, supporter, and advocate and noted that another Indigenous person might answer the same questions differently based upon their own experiences and Native nation. There are hundreds of Native nations within the United States, or Turtle Island, and even among the Lenape there are multiple tribes and clans, each with its own ways of maintaining culture and relating to the land. He described the Lenape as a river people and characterized the Delaware River as something of a central headquarters or port for Lenape life. There are three Lenape clans and their geographic relationships to the river. The Munsee, or Wolf Clan, is associated more with the northern portion of the region. Eeden identifies personally with the Unami, or Turtle Clan; more centrally located, roughly from Easton to Philadelphia and somewhat farther south. The southern clan is more closely associated with South Jersey, the Delaware Bay, and the ocean. There are also multiple Indigenous names associated with bodies of water. The Delaware River is referred to within his community as Lenape Sipu, a name reflecting how intertwined the Lenape are with the river and which, when transliterated, conveys the meaning of the "river of the original people." The name itself demonstrates how central the river is to Lenape life. It influences relationships among people, transportation, nourishment, the locations and reasons for establishing villages, and the ways ceremonies are conducted. Lenape identity is therefore deeply interwoven with the river and other bodies of water.

Eeden referenced traditions surrounding dugout canoes, seasonal fishing and hunting practices, and methods of peacekeeping between tribes. The Delaware River historically functioned as a transportation route not only for Lenape people but for other Native nations as well. He cited the Mohawk as one example of a people whose territory and travel overlapped with Lenape land and the Delaware River. Many different peoples therefore traveled along the river. The Lenape have traditionally been regarded as mediators who participated in problem-solving among tribes in the Northeast, making the river an important waystation for those relationships. That history remains relevant today. Questions involving Native nations, protection of waterways, and prevention of ecological damage still involve what he described as a "highway of knowledge" embodied by the river. In his view, the river continues to symbolize the exchange of information and relationships even in the modern era. The Council's gathering itself is an example of how that tradition can continue through open discussion.

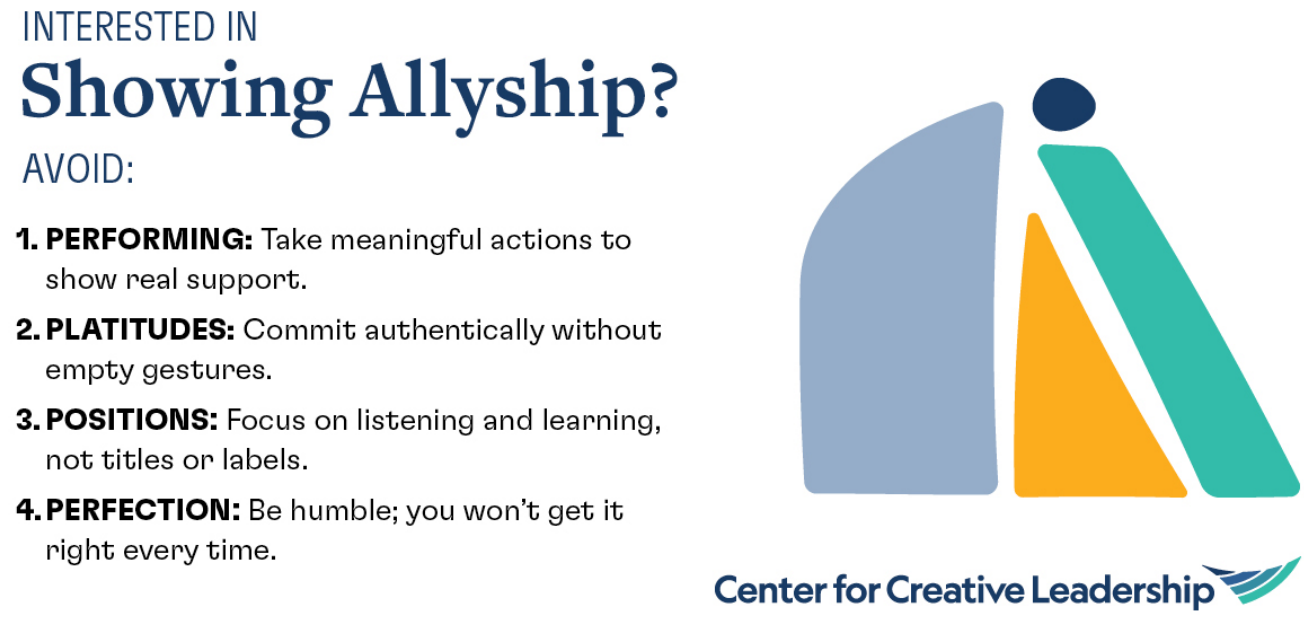
The presentation then turned to differences between conventional governmental or institutional approaches to natural resources and Indigenous knowledge. Eeden said that legislation and government agencies may treat human resources, environmental resources, and budgeting as distinct categories, while Indigenous knowledge may understand people, ecology, and the land in a much more interconnected manner. These perspectives do not have to remain separated or be placed in competition with one another. With a commitment to learning, different perspectives can begin to mesh, rather than discussions being framed as a choice between what Indigenous people would like to accomplish and what a budget or governmental process allows. Incorporating Indigenous communities and their knowledge into decision-making at multiple jurisdictional levels can benefit everyone because it broadens the planning knowledge available to decision-makers. Indigenous communities may possess knowledge that Western society or modern institutions otherwise would not have because of generations of familiarity with a particular landscape, river, ecosystem, and its cycles. This difference should not be understood as anyone's fault, but rather as an opportunity for people with different kinds of knowledge to come together. Indigenous understandings of environmental health extend beyond numbers, statistics, and industrial projects.

Attention is also paid to the overall health of the river because the health of the river reflects the health of the people who depend upon it. This inherited familiarity with natural, non-industrial uses of the land can be particularly helpful when considering issues such as flood mitigation, storm impacts, native plants, erosion, and ecological health. Many native plants face threats from endangerment, over-harvesting, and commercialization, yet the diversity of those plants can play an important role in environmental management. Certain plants and other traditional ecological knowledge can potentially contribute to addressing erosion and other environmental problems. An environmental biologist, for example, might possess scientific knowledge of a particular ecological condition, while a person connected to a community that has observed the same environment over generations may bring another layer of understanding. Combining those forms of knowledge opens additional possibilities. To illustrate this concept, Eeden offered an example from the Gobi Desert in Central and East Asia, where another branch of his family has Indigenous roots. During the 1980s, portions of the Gobi Desert were expanding and producing dust storms that affected cities thousands of kilometers away. Plants were dying and some species had disappeared from the area. One important missing component of that ecosystem was a species of wild horse that had disappeared from

the region and become extremely endangered. At one point, none remained in the wild and the surviving animals existed entirely in captivity. A challenging reintroduction project during the 1980s and 1990s eventually returned the horses to the Gobi Desert. The project was not as simple as releasing the animals and walking away. It required careful planning, numerous stages, considerable difficulty, and setbacks. Once the horses were reintroduced, an unexpected ecological relationship became apparent. The pounding of the horses' hooves helped the desert retain water more effectively. Areas that had previously cracked and contributing to dust storms began changing, and plant species that reportedly had not been seen for approximately 20 years began reappearing in unexpected locations. The horses' role in historic migration patterns and ecological exchange had been an important part of maintaining the ecosystem. Their return contributed to rehabilitation of an environment that had reached hazardous conditions. That is a reminder of what can happen when people pay closer attention to native ecological systems and think creatively about working with the environment. Looking at the historic roles of people, animals, plants, and geology can provide information about how an ecosystem functions. The goal is not necessarily to "optimize" nature in an industrial sense, but to find naturalistic approaches that restore relationships within an ecosystem and ultimately benefit everyone.

Turning more specifically to allyship, Eeden said that within Native perspectives, everything can be understood as a relation. This represents a much more intimate understanding of connection and allyship than the separation often reinforced by the colonial Western world. Personally, he believes everyone has suffered to some extent from that disconnection, not only Native people. Using the Merriam-Webster definition of allyship as the state or condition of being an ally and existing in supportive association with another person or group, he offered a more specific interpretation for the purposes of the discussion. Healthy allyship means understanding where oneself ends and another person begins so that an individual can show up fully for and with other people for a collective benefit. It requires a commitment to listening, learning, and continually growing in the presence of others. It also requires being willing to receive guidance and respecting how another person or group does—or does not—want others to advocate on its behalf.

Eeden displayed the presentation's one slide, adapted from a resource developed by the Center for Creative Leadership, which identified four things allyship should avoid: performing, platitudes, positions, and perfection:




Regarding performing, he said meaningful actions should demonstrate genuine support. Society teaches people to perform or mask themselves in many everyday situations, whether sitting beneath fluorescent lights working at a computer or completing a routine task at the DMV. Part of developing better relationships is recognizing when that kind of guard is unnecessary and allowing oneself to relate more warmly and intimately with neighbors and other people. Support should not center on the person providing it. It should involve giving from the heart without expecting something in return, but also without over-giving or attempting to prove something through one's actions.

A meaningful action may begin simply by asking what is needed. An ally does not need to arrive already knowing every answer.

Regarding platitudes, Eeden said this is about authentic commitments rather than empty gestures. This is particularly important in legal and institutional efforts involving Native peoples and the land. If an organization makes a promise, it should be an attainable promise. If something cannot be promised, the organization should be honest about that from the beginning. Every individual and organization operates within a certain capacity and scope, and there is nothing wrong with acknowledging those limitations. Native nations are likely to appreciate straightforwardness more than an organization forcing a commitment it cannot realistically fulfill. Healthy relationships involve meeting one another where each party actually is.

Regarding positions, Eeden urged participants to focus on listening and learning rather than titles or labels. Drawing upon experience as a first responder, he explained the Incident Command System. The first responder who initially arrives at a serious incident may temporarily become the incident commander regardless of that person's usual rank. That individual begins organizing the response until someone with additional experience arrives and responsibility can appropriately be transferred. The lesson is that everyone has wisdom to contribute and may notice something that someone else misses. Roles remain useful for establishing boundaries and responsibilities, but titles should not prevent people from coming together. Directors, Native people, agency representatives, and others should be capable of sitting at the same round table and making decisions as a team. Effective allyship requires equitable listening and learning, while also recognizing when someone has not been adequately heard or has not had the same opportunity to participate.

Regarding perfection, Eeden encouraged humility. Nobody will get everything right every time. Learning and adjustment are continuous processes. Rather than allowing fear of mistakes to prevent engagement, people should recognize learning as part of being human. Developing healthy allyships involves returning to humanity and understanding the original human relationship with an environment, while seeing one another as members of a human team capable of embracing and caring for that environment together.

Eeden distinguished allyship from partnership. He described partnership as two or more parts forming a whole. Within the context of the discussion, that could mean groups joining together to accomplish social, environmental, transformative, structural, or policy change. Native nations elsewhere on Turtle Island, particularly in western and southern areas of the United States, have been at the forefront of environmental protection efforts and advocacy for preserving natural resources. He referenced Indigenous opposition to data centers proposed for ecologically sensitive locations as a current example and suggested that others can learn from the example of Native nations participating in those environmental debates.

Eeden identified several indicators of a healthy partnership, allyship, or connection. The foremost indicators are compassion, care, and respect. Healthy relationships also require honesty and transparency, along with checks and balances that can be established by the community, board, or group working together. Power should be delegated appropriately, responsibilities should be distributed, and the capacity and scope of everyone involved should be respected. Those healthy relationships also directly affect the Earth, water, and natural world. Returning to the idea that nature is a relative, understanding its condition requires perceptive listening and communication. People can learn how to do this from one another. Although humans participating in the meeting could communicate through a common spoken language, there is something of a "language barrier" between people and nature. By learning from one another, people can become better able to hear what nature is communicating. Indigenous people who have lived in a particular area and listened to its natural signs for thousands of years can provide valuable guidance, and that knowledge can be combined with modern science rather than treated as a competing system. Evaluating and responding to needs is deeply rooted in traditional community practices. If erosion begins occurring along a riverbank, for example, traditional ecological knowledge may identify particular plants whose root systems can stabilize the bank and reduce erosion. If trout populations are low, people might shift their attention to shad while considering breeding areas and seasonal patterns rather than continuing to place pressure on the diminished species. He connected these examples to the phrase "water is life." Communities and water can be protected simultaneously when people pay close attention to environmental conditions.

Attention itself has become a form of currency or value in the modern information age, while appreciation, exchange, care, and follow-through are ways of cultivating that value. A farmer appreciates a harvest because of the

direct relationship with what produced it. Similarly, Native communities traditionally understand and appreciate the natural resources necessary for life through a relationship with nature that modern society often experiences differently because many people have become disconnected from natural cycles. Eeden used food as an example, noting that there is nothing wrong with enjoying the convenience of canned soup from a grocery store, but the experience is different from growing corn in one's own yard or eating a tomato picked directly from the vine. Direct participation creates a different kind of attention and appreciation. He suggested that society does not have to choose one experience over the other. By holding both modern conveniences and traditional understandings together, people can more fully embrace sustainability. Value can then be discovered through symbiosis and mutuality—understanding how one person helps another, who helps another, ultimately allowing the community as a whole to function.

Eeden offered several practical tools participants could use to honor the Native nations connected to the land where they live and work. He recommended Native-Land.ca; a free mapping resource that allows users to identify Indigenous peoples associated with particular geographic areas and provides references that can help users contact tribes directly. He discussed land acknowledgements as one of the primary ways allies can recognize the Indigenous people of a particular place. What makes a land acknowledgement meaningful is not speaking for a tribe. Instead, an acknowledgement should recognize what the tribe gives, what it represents in its own words, and why that relationship matters.

Eeden's advice when approaching a Native nation is to ask rather than assume. Instead of beginning with an outside organization's ideas or priorities, allies should ask Native people what they need and what their priorities are. They should also ask about the tribe's capacity to participate, since tribal organizations are frequently short-staffed. Beginning with those questions creates space for more meaningful dialogue and prevents outside organizations from imposing their own ideas about what support should look like. He also cautioned participants to be thoughtful when determining whether an organization presenting itself as Native American actually represents a Native community. Museums, nonprofits, and other organizations may sometimes characterize themselves that way when that characterization is questionable.

Eeden concluded his presentation by expressing hope that meaningful reciprocity would become something participants carry into their partnerships going forward and that the presentation would represent the beginning, rather than the end, of the conversation.

The Council thanked Eeden for bringing the program to the group. Ramie asked Eeden to preview what would take place on October 17 at the Callicoon Depot as part of the upcoming Indigenous Peoples' Day program. Eeden said that October 17 would mark the first Indigenous Peoples' Day program being hosted together at the Callicoon Depot. He and family members plan to attend, with the possibility that additional members of the Indigenous community would also participate, to provide educational programming. The program is expected to introduce participants to several areas of Native culture and knowledge, including native plants, regalia and craft-making, and language. He teaches the Unami dialect of the Lenape language and anticipates incorporating language education into the event as well. The first year is on a modest scale but the event could be formative in establishing a space for Indigenous education that could continue for many years. An important part of the inaugural program would be hearing from participants and community members about what interests them and what they would like to learn more about regarding Native culture and education. That feedback could help guide future programming and allow the event to grow in response to community interests.

**Approval of August 6, 2026 Minutes:** A motion by Henry seconded by G. Dudko to approve the August 6, 2026 meeting minutes carried.

**Public Comment on the Agenda**: None.

**Committee Reports**: There were no questions regarding previously distributed minutes for Water Use/Resource Management 8/18, Operations 8/25, or Project Review 8/25.

**Status Reports**:

**Delaware River Basin Commission:** Brown referenced the hydrologic report in the packet and said during the most recent reporting period, precipitation totaled approximately 0.42 inches in the upper basin, 0.75 inches in the middle-upper basin, more than one inch in the middle-lower basin, and 0.98 inches near Delaware Bay. Additional rainfall was forecast over the

following week. Combined storage in the New York City Delaware River Basin reservoirs stood at 84.6% of combined capacity. Although that was slightly lower than the previous week, storage remained well above the drought watch level and above the long-term median, putting the reservoir system in very good condition from a water-storage perspective. Conditions are also favorable in the lower basin reservoirs. Blue Marsh Reservoir is at 101% of usable storage, Beltzville Reservoir is at 100%, and F.E. Walter Reservoir is at 81%. Taken together with the New York City reservoir levels, Brown said storage conditions throughout the basin were doing very well overall. River flow is reported as normal. The seven-day average location of the salt front was below average. Brown summarized the hydrologic picture as generally favorable, with adequate reservoir storage, normal flows, and beneficial precipitation throughout much of the basin.

Turning to Commission activities, Brown reported that the DRBC had held its third-quarter business meeting the previous day (9/2). That meeting served as the Commission's annual opportunity to bring its commissioners together for an in-person meeting and was held at Washington Crossing Historic Park in Pennsylvania, a Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources property. A community festival was held in advance of the business meeting, and commissioners also had an opportunity to participate in historic tours and other enrichment activities before beginning Commission business. The overall gathering was a very successful event.

Brown reviewed several upcoming DRBC advisory committee and Commission meeting dates. The next scheduled advisory committee meeting would be the Toxics Advisory Committee on September 28 at 10:00 a.m. The meeting will be conducted virtually, and interested participants can register through the DRBC website. That will be followed by the Water Management Advisory Committee meeting on Wednesday, October 14 at 10:00 a.m., also to be held virtually. Registration for that meeting is not yet available, but registration information should be posted soon. Looking farther ahead to the fourth quarter, the DRBC will conduct a virtual public hearing on November 4 concerning any dockets or regulations scheduled for consideration. The Commission's next quarterly business meeting is scheduled for December 3, which would also be held virtually.

Brown provided an update on drought conditions throughout the Delaware River Basin, noting that New York might also address the subject during its agency report. All New York counties within the Delaware River Basin were at normal drought status. Conditions differed farther south. All Delaware counties were under drought watch, while all New Jersey counties within the Delaware River Basin were under drought warning. Pennsylvania, however, had recently improved the drought classifications for several counties. Delaware County moved from drought watch to normal status, while Chester and Lancaster counties improved from drought warning to drought watch. She said those changes demonstrated that the basin is making progress in recovering from drought conditions.

**NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation:** Absent.

**Pennsylvania Dept. of Conservation and National Resources:** Dugan said that Pennsylvania's hunting calendar has undergone a number of changes and adjustments over the past several years. One of the most significant changes this year is the expansion of Sunday hunting, with Sundays now open for most hunting seasons and species. Migratory game birds and waterfowl are excluded because those seasons are governed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and are subject to federal limits on the number of allowable hunting days. Locally, archery deer and bear seasons will open October 3. Some of the earliest fall seasons had already begun as of September 1, including the resident Canada Goose season and Mourning Dove Season.

In terms of conditions for wildlife, Dugan said the region is seeing a fairly good soft and hard mast crop, including acorns and hickory nuts as well as berries and other food sources produced by understory bushes and shrubs. These provide a variety of natural food sources for wildlife heading into the fall. He connected those favorable conditions to the recent weather. The region has experienced a good amount of late summer rainfall. The rain is helping conditions remain stable, keeping streams full and allowing vegetation to continue growing vigorously.

Dugan reported that approximately 30 people registered for a Hunter-Trapper Safety Education Day, in addition to parents and guardians who attended with them. That turnout was excellent and Game Commission staff indicated it was the largest turnout they could remember seeing for such a program in Pike County and northeastern Pennsylvania in quite some time. He considered the strong participation encouraging as the fall hunting seasons approached.

Dugan turned to two significant developments involving the Pennsylvania Game Commission and Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. The first concerns the Pennsylvania Supreme Court decision involving the Open Fields Doctrine. A major operational consequence had occurred since he reported on this at the last Council meeting:

effective September 1, both the Game Commission and Fish and Boat Commission had relieved their Deputy Wardens of duty, essentially terminating their Deputy Warden Programs. He estimated that the Game Commission alone had approximately 140 personnel serving in these part-time supplemental positions. The elimination of those positions represented a substantial reduction in enforcement staffing capacity. DCNR and colleagues within the Game Commission are still awaiting more detailed legal guidance regarding how enforcement officers should proceed following the court ruling. As he understood the ruling, officers cannot simply enter private property to conduct an investigation. Entry onto private property generally requires probable cause and a warrant, an applicable exception to the warrant requirement, or circumstances such as an emergency involving an immediate threat to property or similar conditions. The agencies are still waiting for additional legal clarification about precisely how those requirements would apply to officers carrying out their responsibilities in the field.

The second major development is a newly released joint study commissioned by the Pennsylvania Game Commission and Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and conducted by the Wildlife Management Institute. He described it as a financial feasibility study examining both commissions, their current financial condition, their long-term solvency, and how their operations could potentially be structured more efficiently going forward. He encouraged anyone interested in the subject to look up the Wildlife Management Institute report online through the commissions. One of the study's principal findings involved the potential for sharing administrative and overhead functions between the two agencies. The report does not propose a complete merger of the Game Commission and Fish and Boat Commission. Rather, it examined the possibility of consolidating or sharing certain services, particularly administrative and overhead functions. According to the report, some degree of shared services could potentially result in savings of up to approximately $34 million per year between the two commissions. The possibility of combining functions is not a new subject in Pennsylvania and has been discussed for some time. Pennsylvania is unusual in maintaining separate state agencies responsible for fish and wildlife management. The Fish and Boat Commission has responsibility for fish as well as reptiles and amphibians, while the Game Commission has responsibility for other wildlife. The new study revisited the longstanding question of whether some services could be shared between the two commissions to reduce administrative overhead without completely merging the agencies. Another significant finding involved the financial pressure being placed on both commissions by the continuing decline in the numbers of hunters and anglers. Because license and related revenues are important components of the agencies' funding structures, declining participation contributes to their longer-term financial challenges. These various factors have collectively contributed to the decision to bring in an outside consultant to evaluate the agencies and their future financial sustainability.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission's Wildlife Action Plan is currently available for public review and comment, with the public comment period remaining open through September 19. Dugan described the Wildlife Action Plan as a multi-year plan and a cornerstone document for the agency. The plan is particularly important in relation to governmental funding. It establishes what the agency is doing, why particular programs and activities are necessary, and the justification for continued state and federal financial support. Maintaining an appropriate action plan is therefore important to the Game Commission's ability to obtain certain state and federal funding and to demonstrate the need for the programs supported through agency-generated revenues and fees.

Dugan reported that the western wildfire season had been very active. Pennsylvania had consequently been sending significant numbers of agency personnel out of state on wildfire assignments to assist with the broader national wildland fire response. Qualified volunteer firefighters were also participating. Once volunteers satisfy the necessary qualifications, they can join state personnel on interstate wildfire assignments. Within his own forest district, almost every staff member who was qualified and available to participate had already been sent on an out-of-state assignment. Only three employees had gone out just once, and two of those employees ultimately had their assignments extended while they were already deployed. A typical wildfire assignment lasts approximately 14 days. If personnel are still needed and no replacement is available, incident command can request an extension of approximately seven additional days. As a result, some DCNR personnel were spending considerable amounts of time away on assignments.

Looking toward the fall, DCNR is also beginning to plan its Hemlock Woolly Adelgid treatments. Those treatments are typically conducted in October, and the district had identified several locations on State Forest lands where treatment work was anticipated.

Dugan reported significant flooding damage in portions of north-central Pennsylvania, in the Williamsport area as well as communities in and around Centre and Clinton counties from the storms that happened the previous night. He had been monitoring the situation throughout the day to determine whether requests for outside assistance would be made and anticipates that DCNR might know more by the following day or Saturday. At least one state park had been particularly hard hit by the storm and flooding. During the overnight and early-morning hours, emergency personnel reportedly conducted rescues involving campers and campsites. DCNR is waiting for a clearer assessment of conditions and the extent of the damage in the hardest hit areas before determining whether additional personnel or resources would be requested.

**National Park Service:** Kurnath gave an update on the Department of the Interior's wildland fire response, following up on an action item from the previous month. Wildland fire personnel across the Department of the Interior were consolidated earlier this year into the new Wildland Fire Service, with the goal of improving efficiency and allowing personnel to be deployed where they are most needed. A new website includes interactive fire maps, incident reports, fire potential outlooks, National Interagency Fire Center maps, and other information on current wildfire activity. Upper Delaware currently has one employee deployed on a wildfire assignment, with the possibility that additional staff could be sent out as the fall progresses.

Kurnath said that Mark Pita, formerly the Regional Chief Ranger, became the new Deputy Regional Director in early August and is now her supervisor. She has not had an official supervisor since approximately April 2025. Effective August 9, Jessica Weinman began a four-month regional office assignment, essentially serving as the regional facilities lead. Maintenance Work Leader Ed Rozanski is filling in behind Weinman. Most of UPDE's summer interns completed their assignments and returned to school in August, while seasonal employees will remain for a few more weeks.

For upcoming events, Upper Delaware will have a table at Railfest at Steamtown and will participate in Friends of the Upper Delaware River's Riverfest in Hancock on September 12. Kurnath highlighted an art project being created by intern Miles Stewart, who is developing a textile weir installation behind UPDE headquarters. The piece will interact with the wind and other natural elements. UPDE plans to share more information about the project and its connection to Stewart's internship through social media.

Under water and resource management, Kurnath reported a successful Dragonfly Mercury Project survey and continued work with the U.S. Geological Survey and Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission to re-survey the dwarf wedgemussel during August. UPDE is continuing work to bring its museum collections into compliance with Secretary of the Interior standards. As part of that effort, staff have removed more than 30 linear feet of obsolete documents, freeing space for materials that properly belong in the museum collection and require appropriate preservation.

UPDE is moving into the next phase of its spill response contingency planning. During the week of September 14, approximately three to five Geographic Response Plans will be tested at key locations, building on the tabletop exercise conducted last year. An additional training on deploying the Geographic Response Plans is expected after the results of those tests are evaluated.

Kurnath reported that seasonal employees collected approximately 484 gallons of trash during August, along with grills, chairs, benches, and several rafts. That brought the seasonal workforce's total to more than 1,500 gallons of trash collected so far this season, with September remaining. Her written report also includes a recap of the upcoming Roebling Bridge work previously presented to the Water Use/Resource Management Committee.

G. Dudko asked for more information about Miles Stewart's textile weir project. Her research showed different types of weirs were used either to hold back water or to filter materials such as silt. Kurnath said Stewart had originally hoped to place the project in the river, but she discouraged that because of potential navigation and visitor safety concerns. He subsequently adapted the concept into an installation that essentially captures or "filters" the wind instead. Stewart is also working with local artist Brian Grady on the project. UPDE will provide more information and notify the Council when the installation is ready to view.

G. Dudko asked where UPDE's museum collection is housed and whether the public can view it. Kurnath said that some artifacts are displayed at the Zane Grey Museum, and UPDE is trying to rotate more items through the museum so the public can see a greater portion of the collection. Other materials are preserved in a climate-

controlled area at headquarters. Kurnath believes researchers and members of the public can request access to stored materials but said she will confirm. G. Dudko asked whether a public inventory is available so researchers could determine what UPDE holds. Kurnath said UPDE has an online data resource and will provide the Council with information on both the inventory and collection access.

**UDC Executive Director:** Ramie began by welcoming the new Westfall Township Representative. This is the first UDC meeting in approximately three years at which Westfall did not have a vacancy in its representation. The previous representative, Mike Barth, had difficulty attending with a conflict on the first Thursdays of the month. The new representative, Tammy Eldred Zajac, said that she grew up along the river in Barryville and has strong family connections to the National Park Service; her Uncle Cliff (Daniels) and Aunt Robin (Daniels) both served as rangers. After spending many years raising her family, she now has more time to become involved and said that although she has a lot to learn, she is glad to represent Westfall. Ramie emphasized how important it is for all member towns and townships to be represented so information and local concerns can flow back and forth between the municipalities and the Council. She also noted Zajac's family connection to Robin M. Daniels and said Zajac has agreed to help present the Robin M. Daniels Lifesaving Award at the upcoming UDC River Valley Awards banquet. Two groups of honorees will receive the award. Ramie initially learned about Zajac's family connection after receiving an award nomination from her. Zajac said that her Uncle Cliff has been filling her in on UDC and river-related matters.

Ramie recognized Driscoll for returning from vacation under difficult family circumstances and immediately catching up on Council work. She noted that Driscoll completed two sets of minutes for the Operations and Project Review committees despite not having attended those meetings, using the Zoom recordings to prepare them. Ramie expressed appreciation that the work continued without interruption.

Ramie reported that the UDC issued a Request for Proposals for graphic design services on August 21, followed by newspaper advertising, social media promotion, and direct distribution to companies and individuals who might be interested. The consultant will be asked to develop a new newsletter template and help convert important documents currently produced in QuarkXPress, which is no longer supported by staff's newer computers. In addition to the newsletter, a major document requiring conversion is the UDC's annual awards booklet. These publications involve text boxes, photographs, and other design elements and will need to transition to Adobe InDesign. Although the Council has InDesign software installed, she has not previously used it and will need training as part of the project. Proposals are due September 21 and will be reviewed by the Operations Committee on September 22, with a recommendation scheduled to go before the full Council on October 1. The contract would need to be executed promptly because the successful consultant will have approximately two months to complete the templates, document conversions, and staff training. Ramie's goal is to be sufficiently comfortable with InDesign to begin producing the Fall-Winter 2026 newsletter between approximately November 30 and its December 7 deadline. In the meantime, the older computer remains available as a backup and was used to produce the recent 16-page awards booklet. Ramie encouraged members to share the RFP with anyone who might have the appropriate graphic design and InDesign skills. The Council has already received four proposals, with a very wide range in pricing.

Ramie updated members on the Council's proposed white paper concerning the history of the River Management Plan, UDC funding, and how the Council operates. Three drafts have now been prepared by board members. Richardson prepared an initial version, Robinson developed another version, and Breen prepared the most recent draft to synthesize the earlier work. Ramie had also reviewed the drafts and provided members with her edits, analysis, and suggestions. The latest version was discussed at the August 25 Operations Committee meeting, but because some members were seeing it for the first time that evening, the committee decided to allow another month for review rather than moving it forward immediately. The white paper will return to the September 22 Operations Committee agenda for further consideration and will eventually come back before the full Council for ratification.

Ramie directed members to the September calendar included in their meeting packets and asked them to review the listed activities and contact her with any questions or additional information regarding the entries.

**New Business:**

a. **UDC Resolution 2026-07: Procurement and Contracting Policy:** Ramie said this is the third draft of the UDC's Procurement and Contracting Policy. We raised the threshold and added language that NPS said is a requirement of our Cooperative Agreement as a federal funding recipient. It has been reviewed by UPDE Community Planner Carly Marshall and Administrative Officer Tara Harbert and is being presented to the council for approval. A motion by Henry, seconded by Richardson to adopt Resolution 2026-07: Procurement and Contracting Policy, carried.

b. **Request for Regional Feasibility Discussion – Upper Delaware Rail -with- Trail Parallel Gateway:** Ramie introduced two letters included in the meeting packet concerning a proposal for an Upper Delaware rail-with-trail parallel greenway. She had expected the proposal's author, Sam Rowe, to attend the meeting, although she had told him attendance was not necessary. One letter specifically suggests that the Upper Delaware Council could serve as an appropriate entity to facilitate a regional feasibility discussion, while the second provides additional details about the concept. The proposal had been distributed to approximately 60 municipalities, agencies, and organizations throughout the Hancock-to-Port Jervis area to gauge preliminary interest, according to Rowe. Responses have been received from the UDC, Upper Delaware Scenic Byway, Delaware County Economic Development Department, Sullivan County Planning, and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation at that point. Delaware County Economic Development is investigating a potential $25,000 to $50,000 grant with a November 1 deadline. Information has also been provided about other possible funding and technical assistance sources, including the Environmental Protection Fund, National Park Service planning assistance, and the Recreational Trails Program.

   Ramie said the proposal is being brought forward strictly for an initial feasibility discussion, with no commitments being requested. The geographic area being considered generally overlaps the territories represented by the UDC and Upper Delaware Scenic Byway, and the proponent did not want it to become a one-person project but rather a collaborative regional effort. Pais said the concept is terrific, although ambitious. It could reasonably be viewed as falling within the UDC's mission. Henry recommended the proposal referring to the Water Use/Resource Management Committee (WURM) to explore whether and how the Council could assist. Ramie pointed out that the River Management Plan has included development of a trail network as a responsibility since 1986, providing precedent for discussing such a project. Concerns were raised about any implication that a trail could simply be established along the existing railroad right-of-way. Henry said that the railroad is active and the property is private, so the concept should not suggest that public use of the tracks or railroad property is currently permitted. He acknowledged that people already walk, hike, and jog along portions of the railroad, but that does not necessarily mean they have permission to do so. Members agreed that these property, safety, and routing questions were precisely the kinds of issues that a feasibility study would need to examine. The concept of a route generally following the river and railroad corridor, rather than necessarily occupying the railroad property itself, is an important distinction.

   Robinson asked in what capacity Rowe was advancing the proposal. Ramie clarified that although Rowe had previously served as a town supervisor for 16 years and was currently seeking election again, he presently held no public office and was submitting the proposal as a private citizen. Martin highlighted language in the proposal indicating that no municipality, landowner, railroad, business, agency, or organization was asked to make a commitment at this stage. Dugan added that Pennsylvania DCNR provides feasibility study grants through its primary grant program, which could be worth exploring. Because the potential corridor crosses between New York and Pennsylvania, the project would be complicated, and questions would need to be addressed about who might apply for and administer any grant. Members acknowledged that the concept could become a long-term, multi-year undertaking, potentially spanning decades given the number of municipalities, property owners, agencies, and other entities involved. Richardson said Sullivan County's experience developing trails along former railroad corridors was cited as an example of how large trail systems can be constructed incrementally, completing individual sections where opportunities exist and eventually connecting them. The discussion was referred to the WURM Committee for further consideration, including the UDC's potential role, feasibility issues, funding opportunities, property and railroad concerns, and possible next steps.

c. **9/8 Special Project Review Committee: 2027 Technical Assistance Grant Applications Review:** This is a reminder that the Project Review Committee will meet on September 8 to review 2027 Technical Assistance Grant applications and hear from representatives from their towns or townships.

d. **Other:** None.

**Old Business:**

a. **Barryville Gage Funding Memo:** Ramie said the Council had agreed to send a memo to agencies and organizations that might have an interest in continuing the discharge data, since the National Park Service's two-year commitment to fund that portion of the gage is coming to an end. The memo was distributed on August 21, but no responses have been received, though conversations could be occurring. Unless another funding source is identified, the discharge data will no longer be collected or transmitted after September 30. The gage itself will remain in place and continue operating, including reporting water height and the other parameters supported through existing funding. What will be lost is the calculated discharge measurement in cubic feet per second (CFS). Approximately $10,000 would be needed to continue that service.

Members discussed what the loss of the CFS figure would mean in practice. Henry said that river height would still be publicly available and that someone familiar with the historical relationship between gage height and discharge could estimate the CFS by comparing the current river level with previous measurements. For example, if a particular river height historically corresponded with a certain discharge, a reasonably close estimate could be made from that relationship. Members questioned why maintaining the official discharge calculation therefore costs approximately $10,000 annually. Robinson said that discharge is not continuously measured directly by an instrument in the river. The river height is measured and then related to discharge through an established relationship based on the characteristics of the river channel. Periodic physical flow measurements are used to establish and verify that relationship. USGS has already developed the channel profile for the Barryville location, allowing CFS to be calculated from the relationship between water level and discharge. He questioned the cost of maintaining that calculation if the channel remains relatively unchanged. Kurnath said that the expense is related in part to the need for USGS personnel to periodically visit the site and physically verify the discharge calculation. Changes in the river channel can alter the hydraulics and therefore change the relationship between river height and actual flow. USGS consequently conducts field measurements a certain number of times each year to confirm that the model remains accurate. When the National Park Service initially restored funding for the discharge data, it took some time to bring the information back online because USGS first had to conduct a physical assessment and verify that the existing model still applied. Kurnath said that USGS can provide a more technical explanation of the costs, but the field verification is specific to maintaining the CFS measurement. If the river channel changes and the relationship is not recalibrated, the existing model may no longer produce an accurate discharge figure.

Ramie emphasized that if approximately $10,000 in funding is not secured, the Barryville gage will continue reporting its other measurements after September 30, but the official CFS discharge data will cease.

c. **NYC DEC Monitoring Reports for Barnes Landfill, Town of Highland:** Ramie said the UDC originally requested updated information in March after Nadia Rajsz reported speaking with DEC officials who confirmed that the agency continues to monitor the site. Because the landfill remains a potential concern and is located near the Kittatinny campground facilities area on the river, the Council wanted to better understand current conditions and what DEC's monitoring has shown. Ramie contacted DEC Regional Director Kelly Turturro and the Council's NYS DEC representative, Ryan Coulter, to request the available information. The subject came up again at the August Project Review Committee meeting after Martin asked about the status, prompting Ramie to follow up with DEC. Ramie received an email from David Pollock, DEC Region 3 Regional Engineer, along with four sets of laboratory results. The material totaled approximately 308 pages of tables, figures, and laboratory data, but it was provided without an explanation or summary that would allow a layperson to understand the findings. She responded to DEC asking for an interpretation of the results rather than simply the raw data. Specifically, she asked them to explain whether any allowable limits had been exceeded, whether contaminants were detected, whether the results showed any trends, and how frequently the landfill is monitored. All of the laboratory information provided was from 2025, which DEC said was the most current data available. Ramie received out-of-office responses from both Coulter and Turturro after sending her follow-up. She will continue serving as the intermediary with DEC and try to obtain an understandable summary of the findings. She offered to forward the

complete laboratory reports to any Council member interested in reviewing them. Keller requested copies of the documents, and Ramie agreed to forward them to him.

f. **38th Annual River Valley Awards Ceremony:** Ramie reported that preparations for the 38th Annual UDC River Valley Awards Banquet has occupied much of the previous two weeks. The September 1 reservation deadline has passed, and attendance stands at 101 people. Central House Family Resort has been given a count of 102 after staff built in a small cushion. Ramie said that Blake Washington, New York State Budget Director, would attend on behalf of Governor Kathy Hochul. Washington is among the honorees connected with the Partnership Award recognizing the effort that resulted in the UDC receiving a $100,000 New York State allocation. Assembly Member Paula Kay will also attend, while Assemblymember Deborah Glick is unable to attend because of the Jewish holidays.

   Ramie said she had contacted the New York State Division of the Budget that day seeking information about the next steps and an appropriate contact person for the $100,000 NYS funding. Although the allocation had been announced at the end of May and appears in the Aid to Localities budget under the Department of Environmental Conservation, the UDC has not yet been assigned a contract manager or received instructions regarding when the funding would become available, what restrictions might apply, or how it could be spent. This is particularly important because the UDC is preparing to consider more than $30,000 in Technical Assistance Grant requests from three New York municipalities. She would like to know whether the state allocation could support those projects and potentially allow the Council to award more funding than it normally could. Henry suggested pursuing clarification quickly, including through available state contacts and with Blake Washington when he attends the banquet. Ramie said that she has been told by Friends of the Upper Delaware River that state funding can take approximately five to six months to move through the process, so the delay itself was not necessarily unusual; the problem was the timing in relation to the TAG decisions.

   Ramie also called attention to a congratulatory message included in the packet from Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro. The wording initially appeared to suggest that the Governor planned to attend the awards ceremony, prompting her to contact his communications office for clarification. She was told that the letter was simply phrased that way and that it should be understood as a greeting and congratulatory message to the UDC and its honorees, not confirmation that Governor Shapiro would attend.

   Ramie said the awards program is already at the printer. Remaining work includes preparing an abbreviated presentation script for the nine award categories, developing a run-of-show for the evening, determining the timing of a planned performance, preparing name tags, and completing the remaining logistical details. She expects this year's banquet to be particularly memorable because of the strong group of honorees and the way the awards tie together with the America 250 theme.

g. **Other**: Pais requested assistance from the Town of Hancock and Highland delegates to request 2025 permits, ordinances, and zoning changes within the corridor for her preparation of the annual code enforcement activity report due to NPS.

**Public Comment:**

**Adjournment:** A motion by Henry seconded by Richardson to adjourn the meeting at 8:19 p.m. carried.

*Minutes prepared by Stephanie Driscoll, 9/10/2026*